

Floor Statement The Honorable John D. Dingell on H.R. 3 The "Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act of 2

Statement of Congressman John D. Dingell, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce

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THE HONORABLE JOHN D. DINGELL
on H.R. 3
THE "STEM CELL RESEARCH ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2007"
JANUARY 11, 2007

Mr. Chairman, on May 24, 2005, the House passed the "Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act of 2005" by a vote of 238-194. On July 18, 2006, the Senate followed suit and passed the bill by a vote of 63-37. President Bush vetoed this legislation on July 19, 2006, the first and only veto during his six years in office.

President Bush's veto came in the face of bipartisan and bicameral congressional backing for the legislation, as well as strong public support for embryonic stem cell research. The language before us today is identical to the language we passed on May 24. It is identical to the language the Senate passed on July 18. And it is identical to the language that President Bush vetoed.

By considering the "Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act of 2007" today, we are reasserting our commitment, dedication and devotion to passing this life-saving legislation. The time has come for President Bush to sign this bill into law.

Stem cells are the foundation cells for every organ, tissue, and cell in the body. Embryonic stem cells, unlike adult stem cells, possess a unique ability to develop into any type of cell. Embryonic stem cell research holds the potential for developing treatments for many dreaded diseases, including Lou Gehrig's disease, cancer, cystic fibrosis, heart disease, lupus, multiple sclerosis, osteoporosis, and pulmonary fibrosis.

The unique properties of embryonic stem cells are not lost on President Bush. On August 1, 2001, the President stated, "Scientists believe further research using stem cells offers great promise that could help improve the lives of those who suffer from many terrible diseases -- from juvenile diabetes to Alzheimer's, from Parkinson's to spinal cord injuries. And while scientists admit they are not yet certain, they believe stem cells derived from embryos have unique potential ... Most scientists, at least today, believe that research on embryonic stem cells offer the most promise because these cells have the potential to develop in all of the tissues in the body."

Despite the President's own acknowledgment of the potential benefits of embryonic stem cell research, the White House has opposed this legislation. Let us be clear about the intent and scope of this bill: H.R. 3 continues the stem cell policy articulated by President Bush. H.R. 3 would establish stricter ethical guidelines for this type of research and would lift arbitrary restrictions on research of embryonic stem cell lines. H.R. 3 will ensure that researchers can continue to work towards saving lives by using newer, less contaminated, more diverse, and more numerous embryonic stem cells.

In addition to the significant medical potential surrounding embryonic stem cell research, there is a very significant economic component to this bill. Under the current research restriction, the U.S. has already lost ground to foreign countries in the field of embryonic stem cell research.

In a June 29, 2005 letter to Senator Levin, University of Michigan President Mary Sue Coleman stated, "Regardless of whether embryonic stem cell research is ultimately used in medical treatments, the study of these stem cells itself will most likely generate significant advances in medical treatments and technology. The current limitation on federal funding is also driving researchers in Michigan and elsewhere to consider moving to other states, and indeed, other nations, which support this research. The University of Michigan has already lost one of its top researchers to Stanford in part because of the state of California's commitment to fund this research."

Some of the opposition to this bill is rooted in deliberate ignorance. H.R. 3 does not permit federal funding for the creation or destruction of embryos. This bill only allows for research to be conducted on embryonic stem cell lines derived from embryos created for reproductive purposes and that would otherwise be discarded. This point is critical: if not used for research, these stem cells will be discarded as medical waste. We can either learn more about life, the human body, how to prevent disease, and how to cure disease, or we can simply destroy these cells without gaining any knowledge or benefit from them first.

President Bush has been urging Democrats and Republicans to find "common ground." I believe we have found that common ground in the form of our united and bipartisan support for embryonic stem cell research. I call upon the President to join Democrats and Republicans in supporting this life-saving legislation.

Former First Lady Nancy Reagan once said, "Science has presented us with a hope called stem cell research. I just don't see how we can turn our backs on this. We have lost so much time already. I just really can't bear to lose any more."

Nor can I. Let us vote again to pass the "Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act of 2007".

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce
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